

100 YEARS OF CONSERVATION AND PUBLIC SERVICE ON THE MEDICINE BOW

"The Civilian Conservation Corps"

The Civilian Conservation Corps played an important role in the nation's forests in the 1930's and early 1940's. The Medicine Bow National Forest benefited greatly from the program.

In March 1933, Congress responded to President Roosevelt's urgings by creating the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC's) under the Unemployment Relief Act. The CCC proved to be one of the most popular "new deal" agencies, providing employment for almost three million young men during the program's existence. Roosevelt had hoped to place the CCC program on a permanent basis; however, the manpower demands of WWII made this unrealistic by 1942. The program was designed to meet the major objectives of economic relief (all but \$5 of the enrollee's \$30 monthly check was sent to his dependents on relief, thereby re-circulating money back into the cities), restoring confidence and "building men", and also resulted in a large amount of beneficial and lasting work.

The camps operated at varying strengths from 1933 through 1942 under the direct supervision of the US Army. The men often came from large cities and poor families, and the sudden transfer to a wilderness environment and harsh climate must have been difficult. Instances of violence may not have been commonplace, but at least two suicides and a fatal knife attack were reported to have occurred within the Medicine Bow CCC camps.

Selection of enrollees involved several requirements. The age limit was initially 18-25, but was apparently modified over the years--18-35, 17-28, and 17-23. WWI veterans were exempt from the upper age class. The men were required to be physically fit, unmarried, and unemployed US citizens who had dependents to whom they were willing to allot most of their pay. The program sought men of character: clean cut, purposeful and ambitious. Enrollment was totally voluntary and there was no discrimination as to race, creed, color or politics. Though supervised by the US Army, they were under no military discipline or drills and wore no uniforms. An enrollee entered for a 6-month term and then could reenter until he served two years.

In addition to the CCC camps, the Medicine Bow also had two transient relief camps, which were established by the Emergency Relief Act. These men at Pole Mountain and Mountain Home, worked under the supervision of the USFS, but were housed and paid by the Relief Administration. Under the ERA, men on Laramie relief rolls were employed and paid by the USFS. The first camp in Wyoming was established at Pole Mountain on May 15, 1933. Six others followed: Chimney Park, Centennial, Arlington, Encampment, Ryan Park, and French Creek. At the end of the 1933 season, there were 835 men enrolled in seven Wyoming CCC camps. Most of the camps were

seasonal with men working in warmer climates during the winter months and returning the following May. Other camps that came and went during the years included Brush Creek, Mullen Creek, Esterbrook and Saratoga Hot Springs (State Park) camp.

Types of work varied from camp to camp, but the tasks generally included the following: maintenance and construction of trails, roads, bridges, fences, telephone lines, ranger stations, campgrounds, picnic grounds, fire lookout stations, and winter sports areas, as well as rodent and insect control, thinning of timber, erosion control, and fire fighting. Roadside cleanup was done by all camps. Timber research plots were established and measured at the Chimney Park Camp. Retaining and rearing ponds for fish were established in several locations. Vedauwoo Glen campground was enlarged. In November 1938, work was begun by the Saratoga CCC camp on a new winter sports course on Barrett Ridge in Ryan Park. Over 280,000 ponderosa and lodgepole pine seedlings were planted in 400 acres of denuded land on Pole Mountain. Seedlings were supplied by the Pole Mountain Nursery.

Throughout the years, the CCC's completed many projects on the forest--range fences, lodgepole thinning, the Libby Creek Ski Area, truck trails, 127 miles of phone lines, the Esterbrook fire lookout, Sheep Mountain boundary fence, blacksmith shops, and garages, to name a few. The Chimney Park camp which operated continually from 1933 closed on July 20, 1942; the last to close. The site of the Ryan Park CCC camp was later used during WWII as a prisoner of war compound. The Mullen Creek Camp, closed during the early years of WWII was renovated in 1943 for use as an Army-Air Force rest camp. It was enjoyed by several hundred men before shutting down in August 1945. It was eventually acquired by the University of Wyoming, which used it as a recreational camp and gradually replaced the original log buildings. The Centennial Ranger Station is concurrently located in the general area of the Mullen Creek CCC camp.